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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1944.

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Subject: "GROWING FOOD IN A COMMUNITY GARDEN." Information from garden specialists of U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Back in 1942, a Chicago homemaker, Mrs. Pearl Ott, started thinking about victory gardens. Mrs. Ott is an experienced gardener herself, and she decided that, in view of the war, many of her neighbors in the Portage Park area of Chicago would probably like to raise some of their own food.

So Mrs. Ott became a leader in the victory garden movement. First she got a large piece of vacant land-- 25 acres-- for a community garden...and even had her son, who's a draftsman, draw a plat of the garden so she could distribute blueprints to interested families.

Then Mrs. Ott "talked up" victory gardens to her neighbors. It was a big job, but many families became interested and asked for plots in the community garden. And when gardening time came, Mrs. Ott advised them, and generally directed the work.

It wasn't easy to make the garden a success. For one thing, the soil was heavy clay, hard to work. Another big difficulty was floods. Three times, heavy rains flooded the garden, washing out crops and rotting seeds. Each time, the gardeners had to go out and dig ditches to drain the land. And Mrs. Ott was right in the lead, even though one time the flood was so deep she was working in water up to her hips. But in spite of all obstacles, the Portage Park community garden produced good crops both in 1942 and 1943.

During the winter of 1942, Mrs. Ott took a job outside her home. But last spring so many requests began pouring in for advice on gardening problems, that



she decided she couldn't do justice to both her job and the victory garden program. So, she gave up her job-- because, as she said, "We don't need the money so much as this community needs the food."

Well, that's the story of just one American housewife and her neighbors, and how they teamed up to help grow more food. Of course every homemaker can't promote a 25-acre garden as Mrs. Ott did. But just as the people in her community found the answer to their food problem in a victory garden, thousands of other families all over the country discovered by teaming together and working a community garden, they could make up for the lack of suitable garden space in their own back yards.

This year even more families will share the experience of a community victory garden, and help supply more food this year. War Food officials have asked for 22 million gardens in 1944, and many of these will have to be community projects. Mr. H. W. Hochbaum, chairman of the victory garden committee of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, says we need to develop many more vacant lot gardens... community gardens...and industrial plant gardens-- and Mr. Hochbaum urged us to keep those gardens producing, even if the shortage of gas makes it necessary to use street cars or busses or even bicycles to reach the garden plots.

So if you want to do your share toward providing a good food supply for your family and for the nation, and if your back yard isn't good land for gardening start looking around now for a plot in a community garden. (By the way, you know how to tell if your back yard would make a good garden, don't you?-- it should have at least six hours of sun a day...reasonably fertile soil...and it should be fairly level and have good drainage.) But, to get back to community gardens-- if you're interested, start making plans now. Ask your neighbors if





they know of a community garden-- or get in touch with local garden clubs...or the local office of civilian defense.. the American Women's Voluntary Services... or, a 4-H club, if your community has one. In some towns you may get information from an extension office of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. If someone in your family works in an industrial plant, maybe you can get a plot in a company garden.

Even if you have a good back yard garden, you may still want to have another plot in a community garden, to raise things you don't have room for at home: potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, and the other vegetables that take up a lot of growing space.

Community gardening needs to be organized in advance, and if you're an experienced gardener, your help can be very important to your neighbors. To quote Mr. Hochbaum, again: "We need more garden leaders, people who know something of gardening and who will take the lead in organizing the work. We need men and women, no matter what organization they represent, who will find ground for gardeners, show them how to prepare it...help them make garden plans...and in every way help our new and old victory gardeners raise more food. Enroll recruits...allot gardens...plan gardens...order seeds and do all these things before spring."

The community garden offers a challenge to every homemaker, no matter if you're old or new at the gardening business. The victory garden has become an important part of our national food program. And it provides many families with more of the right kind of food for good health. More food and better food from victory gardens will help win the war. This year it's important for every family to "grow their own" if they possibly can-- either at home, or in a community garden.

